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Annual report of the Steering Committee of the Partnership in Statistics for Development in the Twenty-first Century (PARIS 21)

Note by the Secretary-General

The Secretary-General has the honour to transmit to the United Nations Statistical Commission a progress report prepared by the Steering Committee of the Partnership in Statistics for Development in the Twenty-first Century (PARIS 21). The report provides the United Nations Statistical Commission with an update on the work of PARIS 21, the programme of workshops and the activities and outputs of the task teams, including the completion of the report on indicators of statistical capacity-building. The report also notes future plans, including the evaluation of the achievements of PARIS 21 planned for 2003.

The Commission may wish:

(a) To note the progress of PARIS 21 to date and the impending evaluation of the initiative;

(b) To comment on its future direction and forward programme;

(c) To review the indicators of statistical capacity-building.

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The Partnership in Statistics for Development in the Twenty-first Century (PARIS 21) exists to boost statistical capabilities, especially in poor developing countries, by promoting a culture for setting and monitoring policy based on evidence, and fostering well-managed national statistical systems that use resources effectively. It is a unique forum providing for dialogue between users and producers of statistics. It works through:

Partnership: bringing together donors and governments in support of country-owned development strategies

Advocacy: to demonstrate the power and use of statistics for policy decisions

Resource: mobilization to be able to collect the right information for policy-making

Information: exchange to share knowledge and foster coordination

Strategies: to build sustainable statistical capacity, by better use of data as a tool for more effective development.

Its membership is worldwide. Members are from Governments, international organizations, professional bodies and academic institutions. They have practical experience and wish to collaborate to improve policy-making through reliable, pertinent statistics.

I. Background

1. PARIS 21 was launched at a meeting in Paris in November 1999 in response to an Economic and Social Council resolution on rationalizing and improving statistics and indicators. The first annual progress report of PARIS 21 was presented to the United Nations Statistical Commission at its thirty-second session (see E/CN.3/2001/24).[1] The second annual progress report was presented to the Statistical Commission at its thirty-third session (see E/CN.3/2002/19).[2] The Statistical Commission welcomed in particular the regional approach taken by PARIS 21 and asked that the statistical capacity indicators being developed by a PARIS 21 task team be presented to the Statistical Commission for review.

II. Goals, outputs and evaluation

2. The PARIS 21 goals are to contribute to more effective poverty reduction and improved transparency, accountability and effectiveness of governance in developing and transition countries, inter alia, to help achieve the millennium development goals. PARIS 21 partnership principles recognize that the people and Governments of developing and transition countries make the most important contribution to development. They emphasize the need for country ownership and leadership, shared long-term international and local commitment and better coordinated technical cooperation.

3. The consortium has now been operating for three years. By the end of 2003, it should have completed its regional programme to raise awareness and promote action in most developing and transition countries. The initiative is to be independently evaluated in early 2003. The evaluators will interview stakeholders in the north and the south to examine the strengths and weaknesses of the initiative and report on the lessons learned and to propose an updated strategy for the work of the initiative beyond 2003.

4. A challenge for PARIS 21, noted at its October consortium meeting, is to bring about a better integration of its activities with development partners, particularly those not normally engaged in statistical capacity-building. There is still a tendency for statistics to be considered as a technical matter only, and for the statistics required to monitor development progress to be considered in isolation, rather than as an integral part of all programmes. The future programme will include:

- An annual report on progress in statistical capacity-building in the developing world, including current initiatives and challenges. This will draw the attention of development partners and the general public to the wider picture on progress in statistics;
- The promotion of the use of statistical capacity-building indicators as a management tool for strategic planning and implementation both at the national and international levels;
- Further development of the advocacy programme of films, newsletters and materials demonstrating good practice in using statistics in development processes;
- The sponsoring of high-level events to highlight the place and value of statistics for key development issues, such as the millennium development goals and poverty reduction strategy papers (PRSPs);
- Checklists and manuals of good practice in improving the policy relevance of statistics in developing countries, using materials developed by task teams and workshops

5. PARIS 21 has continued its work in creating synergy and communication between the activities of those involved in building capacity in statistics and those needing to use its products. PARIS 21 operates through:

- Task teams working at the global level and convened by partner PARIS 21 agencies. These produce the tools and synthesize the knowledge for use by the partners of PARIS 21;
- Subregional PARIS 21 workshops for developing and transition countries worldwide, to develop better user-producer dialogue and to agree individual country outline plans of improvement.

III. Activities

A. Task teams

6. PARIS 21 has five active task teams and one proposed team that bring together, under a volunteer convenor, professionals interested in particular aspects of

statistical capacity-building. Task team members comprise experts from international agencies, donor organizations and from developing and transition countries.

B. Indicators of statistical capacity-building

7. The statistical capacity-building indicators task team, convened by the International Monetary Fund (IMF), has developed a test consisting of 34 indicators (16 quantitative and 18 qualitative) collected by means of a questionnaire, to provide a snapshot of a country's statistical capacity. The objective was to develop generic indicators that would be internationally comparable. This work has been tested in two countries and will be piloted fully over the coming months. A summary version of the full task team report is contained in the annex.

C. Strategic statistical development plans

8. The strategic statistical development plan task team has identified country experiences and best practices for the formulation of national statistical development plans, making use of existing frameworks, such as the General Data Dissemination System (GDDS). The team will place material on the PARIS 21 web site to assist countries in taking full advantage of the initiatives available.

D. Census

9. The census task team has studied the problems of financing censuses from both developing country and donor perspectives and has considered strategies for reducing census costs. Its conclusions are available in a paper presented at a symposium in 2001.[3] Further work will explore opportunities for improving the efficiency of censuses and their contribution to the statistics needed for monitoring the PRSPs and the millennium development goals.

E. Rural and agricultural statistics

10. The rural and agricultural statistics task team started work in 2001 to advocate for greater visibility of food, agriculture and rural statistics (FARS) within the overall system of national statistics. The team, convened by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), works on mobilizing resources; exchanging innovative experiences and practices; cost-effective methodologies; and promoting stakeholder coordination. The team reviewed its work in 2002 and agreed on a regional project proposal to attract multi-agency support.[4] The work is expected to concentrate on Africa initially, but plans to extend to other regions at a later date.

F. Improving statistical support for monitoring development goals

11. A new task team, co-convened by the Statistical Office of the European Communities (Eurostat) and the World Bank and approved by the PARIS 21

Steering Committee in June 2002, will identify, through case studies, the additional actions required to achieve coherence in the statistics for measuring, monitoring and managing development results by identifying specific gaps in national statistical processes and inconsistencies that may exist between national and international requirements.

G. Tools and methods

12. "Tools and methods" was another new task team approved by the PARIS 21 Steering Committee in October 2002. This team will develop and document tools related to the statistics needed for monitoring development policy. The first proposal under this team would be to develop proper methods and tools for assessing multidimensional aspects of poverty as well as for measuring progress towards the development goals, such as quality and efficiency of governance and rights-based development. The team would serve as the "Montreux Group on statistics and indicators of human rights", would report on these issues to the United Nations Statistical Commission and would serve as the advisory board of the project "Methods and tools for assessing governance through reporting and analysis" (METAGORA).

IV. Regional workshops and follow-up

13. By November 2002, PARIS 21 had held four subregional workshops; a further nine are planned before the end of 2003. Regional workshops are the start of a process for improving the policy relevance of statistics by developing the dialogue between the key users of the statistical system and the managers of statistical production in developing and transition countries. During the workshops, country stakeholders agree on action plans for subsequent implementation.

A. Workshop follow-up

14. The regional workshops so far have provided a fruitful environment for relating the output of statistical systems to the priorities of policy makers and initiating strategic planning processes for statistical systems. The policy environment of poverty reduction strategies and monitoring of the millennium development goals are creating a greater demand for statistics among stakeholders. This demand is for statistics traditionally provided by national statistical offices and for newer kinds of information, such as governance indicators and government expenditure tracking as well as a refocus on statistics derived from management information systems in sector ministries.

15. The workshops have led to requests for PARIS 21 assistance at the country level. The active participation of senior policy makers in workshops has ensured the delivery of sustainable outputs, with workshop recommendations followed up and implemented by national Governments. Support for countries that request follow-up to the workshops is organized in a variety of ways: some through traditional suppliers of technical assistance, some from subregional organizations and some through PARIS 21 facilitating national events or enabling countries to access expertise from the region, often supported by donor agencies or trust funds.

16. So far a number of countries have embarked on statistical planning and dissemination activities with facilitation from PARIS 21. Subregional experience sharing has been a key input from PARIS 21 in supporting change strategies for country statistical systems. PARIS 21 has facilitated support in a variety of ways:

- Initiating subregional dialogue between decision makers and statistics producers about the use of statistics in the current policy context. This results in peer pressure to initiate change and increases awareness of local expertise. Countries have already developed south-south cooperation arrangements under their own auspices, or by using sponsorship from regional or donor agencies;
- Increasing country awareness of the policy environment for statistics and demonstrating good practice in meeting the requirements;
- Making experts from neighbouring countries in the region available for advocacy to decision makers or to support change or planning processes;
- Improving liaison between countries and donors to ensure better synergy in support of country-led initiatives, and providing expertise when requested by countries or their partners;
- Linking country workshops to local processes, such as the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Campaign for the Millennium Development Goals.

B. Forward programme

17. A programme of nine workshops will be co-organized with appropriate subregional and national bodies (see table below) and follow-up actions from workshops facilitated in a number of countries. Knowledge and advocacy material from task team activities will be made accessible to partners in the consortium and used in PARIS 21 activities. A programme for systematic outreach to non-statistician development partners will be undertaken during the year which will include high-level events and an annual report on the progress of statistical capacity-building in developing and transition countries.

Programme of subregional workshops

Subregional	*Date*
Central Africa	4th quarter 2002
West Africa I	1st quarter 2003
West Africa II	1st quarter 2003
Central America	1st quarter 2003
Caribbean	2nd quarter 2003
South Asia	1st quarter 2003
East and Central Asia	2nd quarter 2003
Pacific islands	3rd quarter 2003
Arab States	2nd quarter 2003

C. Advocacy

18. Using material filmed in workshops and supplemented by interviews with well-known political advocates for statistics, a video entitled "Measuring the Change in World Poverty" has been made (write to contact@paris21.org to obtain a free copy). In addition, the "Why Statistics?" web site (www.odysseus.it/sfabw/HomePage.html) consists of statistical advocacy reference material. It offers information on setting national statistical system priorities, data quality and financing statistical activities.

D. Web site

19. PARIS 21 makes extensive use of its web site (www.paris21.org) as a communication and publicity tool. The site provides access to presentations and reports from workshops, task team information, country statistical initiatives, details on upcoming meetings and links to other relevant statistical sites.

E. Newsletter

20. PARIS 21 launched a newsletter in April 2002. The newsletter is a means to report on PARIS 21 activities and serves as a forum for dialogue among PARIS 21 consortium members and beyond. Features include reports on regional and country workshops and task team activities as well as links to online resources. The reaction of readers has been positive. Three issues per year are anticipated.

V. Points for discussion

21. The Statistical Commission is invited:

(a) To note the progress of PARIS 21 to date and the impending evaluation of the initiative;

(b) To comment on its future direction and forward programme;

(c) To review the indicators of statistical capacity-building.

Notes

[1] The documents for the thirty-second session of the Statistical Commission are available at http://unstats.un.org/unsd/statcom/sc2001.htm.

[2] The documents for the thirty-third session of the Statistical Commission are available at http://unstats.un.org/unsd/statcom/sc2002.htm.

[3] *Population and Housing Censuses, A Funding Crisis?*, presented by the United Nations Population Fund to an International Symposium on Population and Housing Censuses organized by the United Nations Statistics Division in New York, 7-10 August 2001 (http://unstats.un.org/unsd/demog/docs/symposium_04.htm).

[4] *Proposal for Strengthening Agricultural and Rural Statistics Systems in Support of Rural Poverty Reduction and Food Security in Africa.*

Annex

Overview of PARIS 21 statistical capacity-building indicators

1. In May 2001, PARIS 21 set up the task team on statistical capacity-building indicators to develop indicators that would help track progress of countries in building their statistical capacity. The present annex is a summary of the final report[a] of the task team presented at the PARIS 21 consortium meeting in October 2002.

2. While devising indicators was neither a quick nor a simple task, the importance of monitoring statistical development kept driving the team's efforts forward. The indicators had to be distilled from complex statistical processes performed by a large and diverse number of data-producing agencies that differ from one country to another. Devising statistical capacity-building indicators entailed focusing on the variables relevant to statistical production while ensuring that the information for the indicators could reasonably be provided without undue burden. This meant that the indicators needed to be concise and yet clear to produce. They had to provide for a bird's-eye view of the situation, and this meant limiting their number. At the same time, they had to portray a sufficiently representative picture of the statistical conditions to permit comparison across data sets. They needed to provide a reading that could track changes in conditions over time. Finally, for international comparability purposes, they also needed to be the same from one country to another and to be made available to the international community.

3. The team first worked to build a common vision on what statistical capacity and the building of such capacity entailed. It exploited extensively the rich statistical literature, discussed members' experience in statistical capacity-building and consulted with donor agencies. An international seminar was also convened at IMF in April 2002 to seek the views of 20 Governments with experience in statistical capacity-building. The team met on three occasions (May and September 2001 and April 2002), with intensive work carried out between meetings, and recruited three respected international consultants to help identify and test indicators.

The statistical capacity-building indicators

4. This process led to a group of statistical capacity-building indicators: 16 quantitative indicators and 18 qualitative indicators.

5. The *quantitative* indicators cover resources (domestically and externally funded annual budget, staff and equipment), inputs (surveys and administrative sources) and statistical products. The resource indicators are intended to show the extent of success in obtaining funding both from government and external donors, data sources and human resources. They indicate the bargaining position in obtaining valued resources and the ability to use resources in the production process to achieve performance. These quantitative indicators provide a rough idea of the depth and breadth of statistical activities.

6. Their usefulness is limited, however, as benchmarks against which the values of the indicators can be assessed do not exist. Furthermore, the output indicators do not measure effectiveness, since they do not show to what extent the statistics are effectively used. Nor do the resource indicators provide for efficiency measures,

because the amount of resources used cannot be readily related to all required characteristics of the statistical outputs. The quantitative indicators need to be viewed within the context of how the statistical activities are carried out, as measured by the qualitative indicators that serve more as measures of efficiency and effectiveness of statistical production.

7. The *qualitative* indicators embrace the broader view of factors in the statistical environment, the statistical process and the characteristics of the statistical products in meeting users' needs. They help to show the following: (a) if the legal and institutional environment facilitates the production of the statistics; (b) if the resources are sufficient and the activities meshed to promote productivity; (c) if the culture is amenable to quality work; (d) if integrity and professionalism are protected and transparency measures are in place; (e) if the core statistical processes are performed according to methodological requirements and the source data available and techniques used are adequate; (f) if measures are in place to maintain the relevancy of the products; and (g) if the characteristics of the statistics produced fit users' needs. Each indicator is evaluated against a four-scale assessment level, to which are attached benchmark descriptions: level 4 applies to highly developed statistical activities; level 3 to moderately well-developed activities; level 2 to activities that are developing but still have many deficiencies; and level 1 to activities that are underdeveloped. The ratings were designed with a view that a rating of 3 or 4 would refer to activities that would require no external support.

Compilation of the statistical capacity-building indicators

8. The indicators come in the form of a questionnaire to be completed by data producers. The questionnaire is made up of a table that contains the indicators, along with the relevant instructions for providing the information. The table was designed to serve as both a collection and a dissemination device, with minimal editing required between these two functions.

9. The indicators can be compiled for internal management purposes and/or for international comparability purposes. As a management tool, the producers can apply the quantitative indicators to the data-producing agency under review, and the qualitative indicators to the data being targeted. The results will provide data producers with an overview of the capacity of the agency to produce the statistics in question.

10. For comparative purposes, the indicators need to be common from one country to another, and three measurement levels were selected. The first level, the system-wide indicators, consists in identifying for a country the statistics produced, inclusive of the year of reference, along with the identification of the producing agencies. The second level, agency-related indicators, consists in applying the quantitative indicators to the agency(ies) responsible for producing the gross domestic product (GDP), the population and the household income and expenditure statistics, whereas the last level, the data related indicators, involves applying the qualitative indicators to GDP, population and household income and expenditure.

11. An experimental period is suggested for the statistical capacity-building indicators in order to provide time for data producers to become familiar with the indicators, for PARIS 21 to promote the indicators with the data-producing agency

in charge of coordinating statistics in a country and for the indicators to be firmed up as lessons are learned from their application.

Concluding notes

12. While generally applicable to countries in all stages of statistical development, the statistical capacity-building indicators could be more specifically useful to countries that are "statistically challenged", that is, countries whose statistical systems are not sustainable, as evidenced by their extensive reliance on external assistance.

13. By providing a snapshot reading of these countries' statistical circumstances, the statistical capacity-building indicators should help them in identifying strengths and weaknesses, in planning towards specific goals and in monitoring the activities leading to these goals.

14. The statistical capacity-building indicators can also facilitate communication and coordination among the organizations involved in technical assistance. By providing common measuring rods of countries' statistical capacity needs, they can help to shed further light on the statistical circumstances of countries, providing a means to share results systematically, and presenting a comparative view of statistical capacity-building from one country to another. Furthermore, the indicators can track statistical development over time and, hence, provide the donor community with an additional means to account for its technical assistance.

15. The statistical capacity-building indicators can be viewed as a promising beginning with the intent of further promoting a climate where the statistical information becomes an essential support for national policies and good governance.

16. The final report of the statistical capacity-building indicators task team, including the questionnaire and the benchmark descriptions of data-related indicators can be found at http://www.paris21.org/htm/TT_Indicators.htm.

Notes

[a] http://www.PARIS21.org/htm/task/scbi/scbifnlrpt.pdf.